

## ***Sustaining the Beginning Urban Educator: The First Year Teacher and Innovative Induction Strategies in Urban Classrooms***

Wanda Wade, *University of West Florida, wwade@uwf.edu*

### **Abstract**

As school districts, especially those in diverse settings, face the challenge of retaining beginning teachers while improving instruction in inclusive classrooms, induction programs have become an integral ingredient in these efforts. Effective induction programs have been shown to include mentoring, observation, and feedback, all of which can now be enhanced by utilizing evolving and innovative technologies such as Facetime or Skype. As a result of this technology boom, beginning teachers now have enhanced access to supervising teachers, mentors or other beginning teachers virtually at their fingertips. This article discusses impact of using the Virtual Coaching Model as an induction support system, that uses Bluetooth technology, and Facetime with beginning teachers in urban classrooms.

**Keywords:** technology, virtual coaching, mentor, feedback

### **Introduction**

It is widely believed that one of the main causes of inadequate school performance in urban schools is the inability of administrators to adequately staff urban classrooms with qualified teachers. In today's suburban and urban classrooms teachers are expected to enable optimal development of increasingly diverse groups of students, but also to mitigate the effects of social inequality. To do this requires massive changes in preservice teacher preparation programs and school districts beginning teacher induction program. Even after students graduate from a traditional teacher preparation program, most beginning teachers in all classrooms continue to need substantial support during their first years of independent teaching (Wiebke & Bardin, 2009). The transition from preservice student teacher to 1st year teacher has been described as "abrupt and lonely," and "not gradual or supported" (Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, & Yusko, 1999, p. 15). This process is exacerbated by feelings of self-doubt, anxiety, frustration, and stress (Billingsley, Griffin, Smith, Kamman & Isreal, 2009; Hong 2012). Beginning teachers also struggle with working in a hostile school environment, being unprepared to handle inappropriate student behaviors, and the lack of adequate feedback from mentors, (Billingsley et al., 2009; McLeskey, Tyler, & Flippin, 2004).

### **The Urban Factor**

Research has shown that qualified beginning teachers are more likely to leave urban schools compared with non-urban schools (Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Ingersoll, 2003). The urban beginning classroom teacher not only address issues that apply to all beginning teachers, such as classroom discipline and a high workload, but they also face the challenges of working in an urban environment with children and parents from different cultures, backgrounds, values, and who speak languages other than the teacher's native language (Abbott, Moran, & Clarke, 2009; Zeichner, 2003). In the

classroom, beginning teachers in urban schools must also manage relatively large differences in the students in terms of character, behavior, norms and values, and attitudes.

### **Induction**

A well-planned induction program has the potential to effectively and efficiently address some challenges faced by beginning teachers in urban schools (Billingsley, Griffin, Smith, Kamman & Isreal, 2009). Consequently, induction is not a new concept. In many professions other than education, a true induction period is not only expected it is required (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Physicians participate in internships and residencies. Lawyers often serve as legal clerks or legal researchers. In education however, beginning teachers across the board are expected to assume the same roles and responsibilities as an experienced teacher on the first day of employment. This is an expectation in spite of the fact that teacher preparation at institutions of higher education is limited to field experiences and student teaching (Billingsley, Griffin, Smith, Kamman & Isreal, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

For the past decade, educational leaders and policymakers have conducted research, analyzed results and agree that an induction program may contribute to the retention of beginning teachers (Gilles, Davis, & MacGlamery, 2009). Results of studies have surmised that beginning teachers who do participate in induction programs are twice as likely to continue in teaching as those who do not (Jerald & Boser, 2000) with almost 80% remaining in the field of education after the initial years of being in the classroom, a very promising and encouraging percentage for school districts in urban settings where attrition is especially problematic (Boe, Cook & Sunderland, 2008; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009).

In order to meet the characteristics and needs of a diverse student population, induction programs will require a systemic change from their traditional models (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Connelly & Graham, 2009). The rise of technology has led to access to numerous resources enabling universities and school districts to provide technology-based training and support equal to traditional, blended and face-to-face formats. It is now possible to provide e-learning, video conferencing, virtual observations and immediate feedback on instructional delivery or classroom management strategies to beginning teachers in multiple environments including urban classrooms. It is our position that technology may provide at least a partial solution to the support and feedback issues confronting beginning teachers in urban districts. Online support systems have obvious appeal as it provides access from virtually any location, thus addressing major impediment of the need to physically be present for meetings located at impractical distances. School districts can now partner with outside sources, such as universities, colleges or sister out-of-state organizations using innovative technology solutions designed to provide beginning teachers with virtual support through an enhanced induction program (Platt, Bohac, & Wade, 2015).

### **Mentoring Factor**

Practical experience, with guidance from a mentor has long been recognized as an essential element of induction programs where the mentor establishes, “A nurturing process in which a skilled or more experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, and counsels a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter’s professional and/or personal development” (Anderson, & Shannon, 1988, p. 40). Beginning teachers look to mentors to formally and informally provide support and to provide mentoring characterized by a commitment in the form

of coaching, guidance, advising, and feedback (Clark, Brooks, Lee, Crawford, & Maxis, 2006). Normore & Loughry, (2006) found without strong mentorship, beginning teachers felt overwhelmed, disoriented, frustrated, and isolated. Without this mentor support system in place, beginning teachers in K-12 classrooms struggle and inevitably leave the profession early in their teaching career.

Odell and Ferraro (1992) contended that the goals of mentoring are to provide support, promote professional development, and help the beginning teacher with the daily challenges of teaching (Neilson, Barry, & Addison, 2007; Wiebke, & Bardin, 2009). According to the federally funded Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE, 2002), 72% of special educators new to the profession found mentoring programs helpful. Goals for mentoring programs vary across locales, but typically intensive mentoring programs provide districts with the means to: 1) retain new teachers, 2) ease the transition into the profession, and 3) promote instructional improvement (Liu, 2007; Wiebke & Bardin, 2009). Incorporating a robust mentoring program within current induction programs will require a strong commitment and a paradigm change. Fortunately, it may not require a great deal of money. The recommended technology needed, as well as the mentoring procedures, are less expensive than an annual three day in service conference that includes substantial expenses for per diem and travel while having limited effect in building professional skills (Sujo de Montes, & Gonzales, 2000). Districts must understand the value and viability of these technology opportunities and convince those responsible within the system to think alternatively and produce a technologically enhanced induction program in order to produce the needed change. Principals must remember specifically, beginning teachers are exposed to virtual connections with mentors, now have access to online resources and the opportunity for increased feedback from experts within the education field from remote locations.

### **The Technology Factor**

Technological advances and new approaches to teaching and learning have opened up new possibilities for induction programs aimed at producing more frequent and consistent communication and feedback to beginning teachers in urban classrooms (Rock, Zigmond, Gregg, & Gable, 2011; Wade, Bohac, Platt, 2015). Santagata, Zannoni, and Stigler (2007) found that the use of virtual video-based field experiences helped beginning teachers move from simple descriptions of classroom actions to focused observations about student learning and teacher interaction, which subsequently led to the application of these skills in authentic and individualized settings. Despite this documented success the idea of virtually observing and coaching beginning teachers is a different ball game. It's legitimate to ask why schools should take on this virtual option when a growing body of evidence supports the efficacy of traditional coaching (Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010). The answer lies in the unique benefits derived from a virtual coach and the immediate feedback, which enables a teacher to make better decisions, rescue a shaky lesson, and learn as he or she teaches, is one important advantage of virtual coaching (Scheeler, McAfee, & Ruhl, 2004; Wade, Bohac, & Platt, 2015). Other benefits include savings in time, money, and travel. For instance, central office administrative specialists could conduct virtual coaching sessions with teachers in several schools without accruing travel costs or time or professional experts in one district or state could virtually observe teachers in another, to meet a particular need.

### **The Virtual Coaching Model**

The Virtual Coaching Model (VCM) uses online and mobile technology (termed *bug-in-ear*) to allow a mentor, supervising teacher or field expert to observe a beginning teacher's lesson remotely either down the hall or across the country (Scheeler, McAfee, Ruhl, & Lee, 2006; Wade, Bohac, & Platt,

2015). In addition to observing from a remote location, mentors can discreetly and unobtrusively, provide immediate feedback on teaching techniques as they translate research into practice in the classroom (Rock, Gregg, Thead, Acker, Gable, & Zigmond, 2009; Wade, Bohac & Platt, 2015). Virtual coaching is not a form of spyware, or “big brother.” Its purpose is to provide a virtual mentor who is supportive (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007).

The technology and equipment used for virtual coaching is not overly complicated or expensive, if a school already has computers and Wi-Fi capabilities. The VCM requires both mentor and student teacher to have: 1) a computer, either a Mac or a PC, with a 1 GHz Intel processor and/or Smartphone and/or Tablet, 2) access to a high-speed broadband connection, and 3) Voice Over Internet Program (Skype, Oovoo, Google Talk, Face Time). Depending on the participants' computers, either coach or teacher may need several other pieces of equipment (see fig. 1). Although this may sound complicated, it isn't. We provided the teachers with whom we worked only three pages of installation instructions, and they were all able to get the virtual bug-in-ear technology up and running.

Beginning Teacher	Supervising Teacher	Principal/School Administrator	University Personell
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Equipment               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•PC, MAC, Smartphone or Tablet</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Application(s)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•FaceTime, Skype, Google Talk</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Can be used to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Observe you as a beginning teacher in discreet manner from a remote location.</li> <li>•Provide you with immediate feedback from mentor/supervising teacher in a remote location.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Equipment               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•PC, MAC, Smartphone or Tablet</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Applications               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•FaceTime, Skype, Google Talk</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Can be used to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Observe a beginning teacher in discreet manner from a remote location.</li> <li>•Provide immediate feedback from mentor/supervising teacher to the beginning teacher using a bluetooth earpiece.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Equipment               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•PC, MAC, Smartphone or Tablet</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Applications               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•FaceTime, Skype, Google Talk</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Can be used to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Observe a beginning teacher in discreet manner from a remote location.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Equipment               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•PC, MAC, Smartphone or Tablet</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Can be used to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Observe a beginning teacher in discreet manner from a remote location.</li> <li>•Provide immediate feedback from mentor/supervising teacher to the beginning teacher using a bluetooth earpiece.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Figure 1: VCM Equipment Options

### VCM at Work

Currently, two Southeastern Universities are using the VCM in rural, suburban and urban school districts located throughout the United States. One institution has a online program that places student teachers in their home location. This institution requires direct supervision from a University Supervisor, which makes it impossible to observe all students, classified as online and exceeds the budget allocated for travel and reimbursement. The VCM model provides university personnel the ability to observe beginning teachers in a variety of educational and professional settings (Rock, Gregg, Thead, Acker, Gable, & Zigmond, 2009). The other university is using the VCM as a tool to observe student teachers in rural districts as well as provide those student teachers with immediate feedback during predetermined lessons with specific goals and objectives discussed prior to the observation.

**Feedback Factor**

The ability of mentors to observe and provide immediate feedback creates both the opportunity to correct undesirable teacher behaviors and immediate assistance for evidence based best practice instructional delivery (Colvin, Flannery, Sugai, & Monegan, 2009; Franklin, Sexton, Lu, & Ma, 2007). Scheeler (2008) reported traditional methods of observing beginning teachers in which feedback was provided “after the fact” was less effective for helping beginning teachers develop. In deferred feedback, supervisors take narrative or quantitative data while observing a lesson and share those data with the teacher upon lesson completion, perhaps even later. Beginning teachers who received deferred feedback reported feeling frustrated, and isolated (Boe, Cook & Sunderland, 2008). Deferred feedback also increases a beginning teacher’s susceptibility to repeat mistakes during instructional delivery potentially hindering student development (Rock, Gregg, Thead, Acker, Gable, & Zigmond, 2009; Scheeler, Macluckie, & Albright, 2008). These findings also support one of the many reasons that beginning teachers leave the profession, specifically because of having received limited or no mentor feedback on their teaching performance (Bullough Jr., 2008; Scheeler, McAfee, Ruhl, & Lee, 2006).

**Conclusion**

The evolution of technology has brought the integration of webcams, online video conferencing and email, to classrooms all over the world. This new resource can now be used to facilitate support of, and/or communication between mentors and beginning teachers, as they start their career in education. Unfortunately, not many districts or universities successfully arrange such experiences for new graduates entering the classroom for the first time. As a result, teachers hired to work in diverse and urban classrooms enter a professional occupation armed with knowledge and skills that are not specific to the classrooms in which they may have experienced the internship and often experience loneliness and frustration. Due to the fact that there are too few mentors for beginning teachers, there is an increased need to identify a viable option designed to provide support for beginning teachers located in not only urban classrooms but all classrooms. The combination of technology and the VCM presents an exciting possibility to enhance the support of beginning teachers in urban and rural classrooms (Johnson, Levine, Smith, & Smythe, 2009).

Technology affords induction programs an opportunity to provide professional development at a level of excellence that previously has not been available. It is now possible for beginning teachers to have the advantage of live and immediate feedback as they develop and refine their teaching skills. Additionally, access to professional development from any location is available through the Worldwide Web. This also contributes to the remediation of a sense of professional isolation on some levels. It is up to school leadership to pool the expertise and available resources so that each teacher and administrator has full access to knowledge bases that cover all areas of curriculum and methodological strategies. The available technology described above offers a means and a method to have a professional development foundation that is equal to any education discipline. Although there are some obstacles that will undoubtedly cause users to doubt the process such as connectivity times and issues with Face Time or Skype, problems with beginning teachers having the appropriate privileges on the school districts Wi-Fi internet service or finding a location to place the device that will maintain the call in traditional classroom environments we must remain diligent when integrating the Virtual Coaching Model. Educators and policymakers need to realize technology is here; it is now time for induction supporters to support the concept and provide infrastructure and partnerships to facilitate this type of innovative induction support system for beginning teachers.

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